

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Christ the Vitalizing Principle of Christian Theology

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED UPON THE OCCASION OF HIS INAUGURATION AS
ROOSEVELT PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY IN
THE UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, NEW YORK

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN, M.A.

TOGETHER WITH THE CHARGE ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD
OF DIRECTORS

BY THE

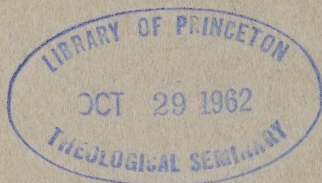
REV. CHARLES H. PARKHURST, D.D.

AND A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE INAUGURATION SERVICE

NOVEMBER FIRST
1898

NEW YORK
WM. C. MARTIN PRINTING HOUSE
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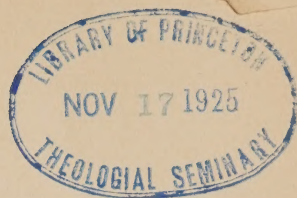
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I.

THE INAUGURATION SERVICE.

THE INAUGURATION of the Reverend WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN, M.A., as Roosevelt Professor of Systematic Theology in the Union Theological Seminary, took place, by appointment of the Board of Directors, in the Adams Chapel, on Tuesday evening, November 1st, 1898, at a quarter past eight o'clock.

The procession entered the Chapel in the following order :
1. Ushers. 2. Choir. 3. Faculty of the Seminary. 4. Representatives of other Institutions. 5. Directors of the Seminary.
6. Officiating Persons.

The representatives of other institutions present were :

From Columbia University, President SETH LOW, LL.D., and Professors NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER, Ph.D., and WILLIAM M. SLOANE, Ph. D., L.H.D.; New York University, Chancellor HENRY M. MACCRACKEN, D.D., LL.D.; Harvard Divinity School, Professor EPHRAIM EMERTON, Ph.D.; Yale Divinity School, Professors GEORGE P. FISHER, D.D., LL.D., and WILLIAM F. BLACKMAN, Ph.D.; Drew Theological Seminary, President HENRY A. BUTTZ, D.D., LL.D.; Hartford Theological Seminary, Professor EDWIN K. MITCHELL, D.D.

Courteous messages of regret were received from many institutions.

The ORGAN VOLUNTARY was played during the entrance of the procession by the Musical Director of the Seminary, Dr. GERRIT SMITH. At its conclusion PRAYER was offered by President CHARLES CUTHBERT HALL, D.D.; after which the HYMN, "The Church's One Foundation," was sung by the Choir and Congregation, and the SCRIPTURE LESSON, Ephesians iv: 1-16, was read by Professor GEORGE P. FISHER, D.D. Mr. JOHN

CROSBY BROWN, the President of the Board of Directors, then spoke as follows :

"At a meeting of the Board of Directors of this Seminary, held on the 16th of June of this year, the Reverend WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN was elected to fill the Roosevelt Chair of Systematic Theology.

"Graduating from the Seminary in 1890, appointed Instructor in the Department of Church History in 1892, Instructor in Systematic Theology in 1893, and Provisional Professor in the same Department in 1895, he is now to assume the full responsibilities of the Department, and, in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution of the Seminary, to make the declaration required of every Professor before entering upon the duties of his Chair.

"I now call upon the Reverend Mr. BROWN to make the constitutional declaration."

Thereupon Professor BROWN made the declaration, as follows :

"In the presence of God and the Directors of this Seminary, I solemnly affirm that I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice ; that I receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith, in all the essential and necessary articles thereof, as containing the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scripture ; that I approve of the principles of the Presbyterian Form of Government ; and that I will not teach anything which shall appear to me to be subversive of the said system of doctrine, or of the principles of the said Form of Government, so long as I continue to be a Professor in this Seminary."

Mr. JOHN CROSBY BROWN then said :

"Having been elected by the Board of Directors a Professor in this Seminary, and having made in this public manner the declaration required by the Constitution, on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Union Theological Seminary, I now declare the Reverend WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN duly inaugurated as Roosevelt Professor of Systematic Theology, and entitled to discharge all the duties of that chair in this Seminary.

"In view of the peculiar relationship in which we stand to each other, and the associations that cluster around this spot, it may

not be out of place if, using the words prepared of old by the Holy Spirit, I bid you, 'My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus....Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ....And the Lord give thee understanding in all things.'"¹

The CHARGE on behalf of the Board of Directors was then delivered by the Reverend CHARLES H. PARKHURST, D.D.

Thereupon the INAUGURAL ADDRESS was delivered by Professor WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN, M.A.

At its conclusion the HYMN, "Immortal Love," was sung by the Choir and Congregation; PRAYER was offered and the BENEDICTION pronounced by Professor THOMAS S. HASTINGS, D.D., and the procession retired during an ORGAN VOLUNTARY by Dr. GERRIT SMITH.

¹ II. Tim. ii: 1, 3, 7.

II.

CHARGE

BY THE REVEREND

CHARLES H. PARKHURST, D.D.

My Dear Brother :

The part assigned me in this inaugural service is to me particularly grateful. The choice has fallen upon me not because I am a theological expert, but rather, perhaps, because I am not, and still more because of the relations of intellectual and personal sympathy which have subsisted between us now almost since the time that you were a lad.

The circumstances in the case will then, rather naturally, reduce to terms of simplicity the counsels and hopes I have to express to you, and will lend to my address to-night not so much the character of a charge as of a friendly conference touching certain matters of heaviest import weighing upon your heart and mine on this beautiful but august occasion.

Although younger than most on the assumption of such grave and delicate responsibilities, you are really no novice in the position upon which you now for the first time make formal entry, but by your tentative services here have already established yourself in the confidence of Trustees, Faculty and students. You have earned your welcome, and that, too, in the face of difficulties which you were discerning enough to forecast, and which your friends were affectionate enough solicitously to appreciate. It is in a very large sense true, then, that you have already passed the experimental stage and can look forward to your tenure of office here with confidence in God and with an assured expectation of success. You can go about your work therefore quietly and confidently, and "in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

It is three-fourths of success always to see distinctly and to feel profoundly what it is exactly that we are undertaking to do ; and

so let me remind you that as professor in this seminary your supreme function will be to encourage, to qualify and to inspire young men to become preachers of Jesus Christ. The world is not going to be saved by art, by science, by philosophy, nor by evolution, but by the Gospel, through the agency of preachers of the Gospel, and preachers of the Gospel it will be your exclusive professional obligation to help make. This I say, not because I question your acceptance of the proposition, but because I know your cordial accord with it and intense devotion to it. This means that as part of the producing efficiency of this Seminary you are not going to encourage any kind of learning for its own sake. In such an institution learning *per se* is of no account. Everything here is to be adopted or refused according as it does or does not definitely bear on the work of making young men better fitted to hasten the millenium, and the genius of the millenium is not scholarship, but holiness. Scholarship is a corollary from holiness, not holiness from scholarship.

I have taken no brief against scholarship, but Union is not a high school, an academy or a college, but a cradle of the prophets, and will be blest of God just according as it keeps to the line of its destiny. Learning is of no account here, in itself considered. With all of scholarly taste that characterizes you, and of scholarly acquisition that distinguishes you, any effort of yours would be misplaced and out of its proper latitude that should stoop to the academic purpose of training students, any one or all of them, to be mere luminaries in the firmament of theological science. The strength of this Seminary will be in the number of men that it puts into the ministry qualified to make the will and love of God the governing motives in biography and history.

You appreciate the tendency and the danger against which these words of mine are intended to guard, and will not force them beyond their proper intent. An idea does not cost as much as a passion, and consequently it is easy for a theological Seminary, with the best of intentions, to settle into academic grooves. This is not a brain factory. Students that have not brains enough to become preachers before entering the Seminary would best promote the good cause by remaining elsewhere till they have. Pure intellectual drill has no proper place in such an institution. It is a good thing that we keep its distinctive province sharply

defined. Your function as a professor here will not be to create intelligence, but to take the intelligence that comes to your hand, to shape it to the service to which the ministerial mind is called, and to inspire it for the mission to which such mind is divinely anointed. Perhaps I can state the case by saying, that while the academy concerns itself with ideas as something which the intelligence beholds, the Seminary concerns itself with realities as something which the heart personally experiences ; and because it is easier to be a schoolmaster and deal in ideas than it is to be a prophet and become the inspired vehicle of a personal experience, therefore it is a simpler matter to be a theological pedagogue than it is to become the quickening, soul-upbuilding energy called for in the position which you to-night assume.

I am only stating what you already understand just as well as I, that the essential distinction of a Seminary does not lie in the subject-matter treated in a Seminary. The simple fact that theological students study Deity while medical students study medicine, is not what draws the true line of discrimination between the two sorts of application. This is a principle to which I do not think the average theological professor accords sufficient regard. Theology, considered simply as a science, has in it no more of the essence and genius of religion than has philosophy ; indeed is simply one department of philosophy. Intellectually contemplating Christ is no more Christianity than intellectually contemplating the stars. It is said that Rufus Choate used to put his law-students upon the study of theology, but that did not make of his law-school a theological Seminary any more than though, for the purpose which he and they had in view, he had set them to studying geology or zoölogy.

The question hinges not on what is studied, but on the personal attitude sustained by the student toward the subject-matter of study. So in your class-room theology might be studied with the same purely intellectual animus as that with which Choate's students studied it, and calling it "studying for the ministry" would not change the results that would come from calling it "studying for the bar." Studying theology as a branch of philosophy does not fit for the ministry any more than studying Hebrew as a branch of linguistics.

It is so much easier to think and puzzle about the divine than

it is to feel our personal relations to the divine and to have a consciousness of the divine, that it is not strange that it is often difficult to distinguish between the atmosphere of a Seminary class-room and that of a college class-room. That is the secret of the spirit of scholasticism into which we all know that such Seminaries so easily degenerate. And opening the exercises of the class-room with prayer does not meet the necessities of the case if, when the prayer is finished, the "Amen" spoken, the note-books gotten out, and the pencils sharpened, the presiding genius of the occasion drops out of his high role of prophet into the small performance of a school-master.

I am urging this matter before you not so much in the way of counsel as fact upon which I believe you and I are in thorough accord. But these are things to be said, and this is a good time to say them. There is always a tendency to drift from religion as matter of life to religion as matter of brain. There is nothing which when left to itself does not run down hill. Gravity is almost the only thing that never gets tired, and it is never safe to stop fighting it. Yet it is my confident thought in regard to your work here and the spirit in which you enter upon it, that students will retire from your class-room, not as students, not as linguists, not as metaphysicians, not as theologians even, but as disciples who are burning to become apostles and to declare to a sick and tired and wicked world the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Another danger to which you will be exposed, but against which I am sure your own width of conception will secure you, will be that of trying to reduce the truths of religion to the *easy* grasp of your students. It is one thing to shape your instruction in such a way that the student will grasp the truth and another thing to shape it in such a way that the truth will grasp the student. It is one thing to put the truth into the student and rather a different thing to immerse the student in the truth. It is the ambition of intellectualism, pure and simple, to whittle truth to a point and attenuate it to a definition. Truth can be pictured and truth can be sung, but truth cannot be defined, and the bigger the truth the more savagely it defies definition. Christ defines nothing, and I recall but one definition of St. Paul's, and that one we might not agree to call a brilliant success. Definition,—the word itself says as much,—is an attempt to set limits. The entire process is an attenuating one. A definition is to a

truth just what a rail-fence is to the ground that is fenced,—not the substance of the thing contemplated, but the point where it leaves off.

You will find students, if you have not already, who want a theology that they can put down in their note books,—statements of God, inspiration and redemption, that they can pack away in their pocket-diaries. There is an intellectual satisfaction in imagining one's self able to state a great reality in a paragraph ; it makes one feel somewhat as the dictionary might be conceived to feel if it could become endowed with consciousness.

I have observed sometimes, when a young output from the Seminary has come before the examining body for licensure, the wave of satisfaction that will drift across the face of that body, when the candidate, loaded with theology of the pocket-diary type, answers the fire of his inquisitors with words of easy profundity whose import is predominantly spectacular. The unfortunate thing about examining bodies of that ilk is that they put a premium on theological parrotry, that they create a market for theological technicalities, that they encourage intending theologians to patronize theological cram-shops, and that they thus dishearten and ward off from the ministry of the Gospel the very ones most needed to its strengthening and enrichment, and seduce into the ministry exactly those best suited to sap its virility.

I am not speaking this in the interests of belief that is unsound, but in disparagement of belief that is cheap,—belief that amuses itself by fingering the edges of truth and by mouthing the phrasings of truth, but that has never felt itself standing on holy ground in the near view of a burning bush, that burned and was not consumed, and that never has been caught up with St. Paul into heavens so high as to hear words that were unutterable. Vigorous then as will be the intellectual assaults upon truth in which you will lead your students, you will nevertheless encourage them to feel that the greatest part of any truth is that part of it which cannot be known, and into which even the slow processes of the ages to come will only begin to initiate them. You will stimulate then the long look toward the things that are unseen rather than the microscopic look into the things that are close by; for it is only in this way that even the nearer realities become irrigated into verdure, somewhat as in the summer heat of the

dry Swiss valleys, it is not the springs that well up from within the valleys themselves that brighten the air and freshen the ground, but the rivulets that slip down the slopes of the mountains and that trickle from the high snows where only the sun lights and God's eye rests.

Fortunately, however, plodding intellect is not the only nor the most productive means of coming to the truth. Without disparaging brain-culture, it is even so to be remembered that brain is not the exclusive organ of intellectual vision, nor the organ that is the most sensitive or that carries the farthest. Paul must have had something of this kind in view when he wrote,—“the eyes of your heart being enlightened,”¹—which until lately we have been taught to read,—“the eyes of your understanding being enlightened.” The “*understanding*” imports rather the mechanism of the *brain*, while by “*heart*” we understand the hearthstone of the *passions*. There is a current prejudice against feeling considered as means of arriving at the truth. There are grounds for the prejudice, but we incur no risk in saying that there is as much ground for prejudice against pure thought considered as means of arriving at the truth. If it is thought that arranges, catalogues and labels discoveries when made, it is passion that *makes* the discoveries. Passion is thought in its advanced guard. Passion is thought at its hot end, and melts a passage along which slow-paced intellectualism follows at its languid and mechanical leisure. It is in the order of nature for things to begin hot. Even this earth of ours is gradually coagulating from its original molten fervor, and in course of time will become the victim of the same eternal ague that has already paralyzed the moon. And the same is true in a yet finer way of all which concerns us in the higher ranges of personal life and experience. The world's great enterprises have all been passionately initiated. Cold blood has accomplished little of humanity's choicest work. Nature yokes light alongside of heat for all special effort that she undertakes. Men have moved into the future upon paths that feeling has engineered, but to whose safety or even sanity reason would not have been willing to certify. Religion began as a passion. Art began as a passion. Young literature is always passionate. Poetry is the enthusiasm of letters ; prose is poetry that has grown tired and slowed its pulse. It is a delicious feature of childhood

¹ Eph. i : 18.

that its thoughts about things and about God are always fervid, and a child's thoughts are long thoughts.

That to me, at least, composes the fascination of very much of the Bible. I want to listen to it just as I would listen to a piece of music without being obliged to translate it into articulate thought. There is a great deal of it doubtless that prosaic construction falsifies, just as Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words" you would turn into lie by rendering them into nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Music goes farther than words, and in something the same way Scripture goes farther than theology. Anatomy analyses the human body, but when the analysis is finished the body is no longer a live body. Life and analysis have nothing in common, and are mutually inimical. Your task will be to deal with the great pulsing body of biblical truth anatomically, without reducing its temperature, spilling its blood and smothering its life. I congratulate you that you have been thought to be a man capable of performing so extraordinary a feat, and you will be more and more deserving of congratulation as your competency for achieving so difficult a success goes on demonstrating itself.

Your opportunity for service in just this direction is incalculably great. The drift in some quarters is toward analytical intellectualism, and it is fatal, and the finer and greater the thing it tries to handle the more fatal it is. And that is the dangerous side of every theological enterprise, that it gives us the elements of the great body of divine truth without giving us that body itself in its organized and living totality, or, if it does succeed in framing the elements together to the construction of a "system," runs the risk of putting everything into the "system" with the serious exception of that very life-element which alone can save the system from being merely a dexterous piece of cabinet-work. When a distinguished theological divine (from Pennsylvania, I think) once supplied the Madison Square pulpit for your grandfather of revered memory, after finishing his discourse he turned to Dr. Adams, who was with him in the pulpit, and with a smack of his lips remarked to him,—“That is what I call the very bones of the Gospel.” “Yes, I should think it was,” answered Dr. Adams, “but we like a little flesh on ours.”

And so I repeat it, my Brother, that there opens itself before you a wide door of large and far-reaching opportunity. You

will stand here as an exponent of that large and earnest class of Presbyterian Christians who, while they realize the necessity of bones, appreciate also the fact that bones do not exist for the sake of the science of osteology, but for the sake of being wrapped around with blood-saturated flesh, and strung with palpitating muscles, and that whether in the human body or in the body of the Gospel bones never look so well as when they are farthest out of sight. That is what this Seminary stands for, what its founders intended it to stand for, what those who are charged with its direction and maintenance are laboring together in solid and confident accord to make it stand for, and what you by the conspiracy of your own enthusiastic effort are going to help make it stand for, more and more,—an exponent of the realities of our holy Christian faith,—secondarily as they are conceived by the Presbyterian Church, primarily as they are set forth in the Word of God, but those realities of our faith interpreted always not as shibboleths, not as a catalogue of doctrinal technicalities, but as a great living verity, the organized whole of the truth of God as He is in Christ.

But when all has been said in behalf of intellect considered as means of knowing the truth, and in behalf of passion considered as means of knowing the truth, there still remains the solemn caveat of the Apostle Paul,—“The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God.” It is exactly “the things of God” that you are going to handle before your students, and your supreme competency for the work will be found, after all, in the momentous prescription just quoted. Whatever may be the fine finish of your school-training, and whatever resources of fervid enthusiasm you may have at command, you are not going to see divine truth except as you see it through divine eyes. “The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God.”

Unfortunately we have condemned the word “inspiration” to a particular and isolated field of divine operation, and it is a trespass upon current usage to employ it in the full urgency of its scriptural intent in connection with work like your own or mine. But the word voices a reality that lies so close to the heart of the entire Christian matter that we can ill afford to relegate it to any single or technical function. Just as much to-day as back at the first beginnings of Christianity, those who would *declare* the truths of God must be inspired to *behold* the truths of God.

And I use the word "inspiration" in exactly the sense in which it is usual to employ it of apostolic utterances in the New Testament, or of prophetic utterances in the Old Testament.

We are not here to question the importance of a preacher's believing in the inspiration of the old prophets, but it is a thousand times more important that a preacher or Christian teacher should be able to say,—“I believe that *I* am inspired,” than it is for him to be able to confess his belief in thirty-century old inspiration, and I do not know that I ever heard either a Presbytery or a Congregational Council ask a candidate for licensure if he believed in his *own* inspiration. Three-thousand-year old inspiration is well enough; *that* we are not impugning; and belief in three-thousand-year old inspiration is well enough, and *that* we are not impugning; but it is not belief in Moses' inspiration, nor in Isaiah's nor in Jonah's inspiration that is going to save to-day's world, but inspiration brought down to date and experienced on the spot. We are laying a good deal too much stress on the archæological in our appliances worked for to-day's evangelization. Nothing so quickly grows stale and needs renewing as gifts of the divine Spirit. The history of what God's Spirit *has* spoken through ancient prophets is no fit substitute for what that same Spirit wants to speak through modern prophets. The only irresistible persuasiveness is that which is born of vision, and it is *not* vision to be able merely to describe what some seer *has* seen, though it were Moses or Paul that was the seer. You will not make preachers of your students by merely playing off upon them inspiration of which you are not yourself the subject. You can help them to see that which you yourself see, and what you yourself see must be, as St. Paul says, that which you see through God's eyes. You will fall short of your superb opportunity unless you encourage and stimulate them to become prophets,—not prophets in the sense of fore-seeing, for that of course is not the essential import of prophecy, but prophets in the sense of beholding,—not inferring, not supposing, not taking on trust,—but seeing, and that means direct endowment of divine vision. “The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God.”

And thus, my dear Brother, although for the time the bulk of your service will not be rendered in the pulpit, yet instead of ceasing on that account to be part of the preaching ministry of the Church, your function as a preacher becomes only emphasized

and magnified, I would even say glorified, by your entrance into the peculiar field into which you are now inducted. Great and solemn as is the privilege of becoming the voice of God to a single congregation, the sphere of *your* influence is to be almost incomparably wider, for the prophetic function which you here discharge will be rendered in the presence of those who away out in the coming century, and in every longitude of our globe, will be themselves prophets and bishops in the manifold dioceses to which the providence of God may elect them. Thus do you become not simply a bishop but an archbishop over that broad archiepiscopate of souls out over which, through the instrumentality of your students, your influence will extend, your word become a power, and your inspiration work with an effect that is a quotation from the very mind and heart of God.

May the power of God, the love of His Son, and the quickening of the Holy Spirit, rest in triune blessing upon you and your work.

III.

CHRIST THE VITALIZING PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR

WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN, M.A.

Mr. President and Members of the Board of Directors :

This is to me an hour of many and of tender associations. In the providence of God I have been bound by ties of peculiar intimacy to many of those who have loved this Seminary and who have labored for her upbuilding. To speak only of the past,—for the present is too near to make special reference either necessary or appropriate,—I cannot but think of that well-remembered figure, whose name and presence this chapel commemorates, and of that other man of God,—less widely known, but no less devoted to this Seminary, of whose enlightened liberality the endowment of this Chair is a memorial. It is not often given to a man to enter upon a work so consecrated by ancestral prayers.

But there are ties of spiritual as well as of physical ancestry, and of these also I would say a single word. It was in this Seminary that I received my theological training, and to the spirit of Union, at once reverent and fearless, I owe more than I can ever express. From those who are to be my colleagues I have received, both as pupil and as teacher, constant inspiration and unfailing help. I have lived long enough within this Seminary, and have entered deeply enough into fellowship with those who here teach and study, to appreciate something of the opportunity which opens out before her, and to realize how great is the responsibility which he assumes who becomes a part of her permanent life.

The office of theological teacher is at best one of heavy responsibility. And this is peculiarly the case with the Chair to which you have called me. It is not easy to follow such men as Smith and Worcester. Nor can I forget on this occasion that revered and beloved teacher, at whose feet as a student it was my privilege to sit, and from whose lips I first received instruction in theology as a system. To me Dr. Shedd will always remain Roosevelt Professor, nor can I make it seem quite fitting that I should be sitting in a Chair he filled with such beauty of character and such scholarly distinction. No one realizes more keenly than the speaker how much too narrow are these shoulders for the mantle which you would put upon them.

But great as is the responsibility of the place to which you call me, its opportunity and inspiration are even greater. When I think what it means to teach systematic theology in this age and in this Seminary, my heart leaps up within me, and I thank God that it is my privilege to have part in so glorious a work.

For what is this work, to which you call me? Is it, merely, to hand down to the present generation of students the doctrinal system which has been inherited from the past ; to explain and to defend the creeds and dogmas of the historic Church ; to mark off with the sharp precision of a rigorous logic, the narrow path, by following which alone men may hope to escape the pitfalls of heterodoxy on the right hand and on the left. So the work of the theologian is conceived by many. And we need not deny that their view contains a measure of truth. It is his duty to understand and to explain the systems of the past ; to know and to love, and so to defend with a wisdom born of knowledge and love the great creeds in which the Church of Christ has confessed her historic faith ; to distinguish amid the currents of conflicting opinion those which are permanent and abiding from those which are merely the shifting eddies of an ever-changing speculation. But the question still remains why he needs to do this, and what the end which he seeks to accomplish. Are we to think of the system as an end in itself, or is it merely the means to a higher end,—the building up of Christian believers in faith and love? Are the doctrines which form the subject-matter of our science dogmas to be received on authority, irrespective of their contents ; or are they living convictions, born of experience, and maintaining themselves in spite of all opposition because of

the response which they wake in the hearts and consciences of men? In short, is the system which we seek to unfold primarily a law-regulating belief, or is it itself a Confession of Faith?

I am very sure, Mr. President, that I shall not be out of sympathy with the spirit of this Seminary when I adopt the second of these alternatives. The system of theology, as I conceive it, is in fact, and of right ought to be, a Confession of Faith. It is the expression of the Christian view of the world as a whole,—the testimony, rounded and complete, to the great convictions which underlie the life of the Church, and which inspire her worship, her work and her sacrifice. Like all true confessions it is the outgrowth of experience, and differs from others only in its greater symmetry and completeness. It is indeed the final product of the Christian experience, using that word in its broadest and most comprehensive sense.

It is this connection with experience which gives to the work of the theologian at once its dignity and its interest. He is not concerned with matters which lie in some mysterious realm, above the reach and the control of human reason. He has to do with the religious life itself, as a great and fascinating fact, as real and as near as the facts which form the subject-matter of any of the other sciences. It is his to understand this life, to trace it to its roots in God, to discover and to voice the great convictions upon which it feeds and by which it is inspired, and so to make possible a confession which, because the outgrowth and expression of experience, shall be at once genuine and adequate.

By this connection of doctrine with experience we do not make it something merely subjective and arbitrary. This is indeed sometimes asserted, but without reason. Every true experience is a revelation of reality, and is possible only through contact with objective facts. The Christian experience is no exception to this rule. It has its origin in the Christian revelation, meeting the religious needs and longings of mankind with the manifestation of that divine Saviour in Whom God and man are one. It grows and strengthens by contact with the historic Christian institutions. From the Scriptures with their present revelation of Christ; from the Church with her creeds, her ministry and her sacraments, it gains nourishment and robustness. Without these it could not maintain itself. Apart from these therefore it cannot be truly represented.

When, then, we speak of the Christian experience, we include in that term the objective facts by which that experience is created and maintained. The Bible, the Church, and above all that Christ whom the Bible reveals and to whom the Church witnesses, these must ever furnish the theologian with his material. No theology can be true to experience which ignores the historic Christian facts. But it is equally true that no theology can understand the facts which does not relate them to that life for the sake of which they exist. Christ came not merely to reveal God, but to save men. And His revelation cannot be understood apart from His redemption. It is this saving work, not only promised but experienced, to which the Church bears witness in her creeds and systems; and it is this which gives them permanent value. Take away from the historic doctrines that living experience of which they are the outgrowth, and they become mere dogmas, dead and lifeless, empty forms without value or meaning, relics of an age long past and of a type of thought which we have outgrown. We may, indeed, profess them with our lips, but the profession will be a mockery. For the substance which gives life to the form, the reality of which the doctrine is the expression, and which alone makes it worthy of belief, is gone.

It is, then, with this underlying spiritual reality that the systematic theologian has to do. This determines his attitude to the historic creeds and systems. He is not merely to be a steward, handing down without change that which he has received from the past. He is to be an interpreter, unfolding to the men of the present the meaning of that past. He must show men the abiding spiritual truths for which the old doctrines stand, and apply these to the problems of present thought and life. Such interpretation is possible, because the Christian doctrines, even in their most scholastic form, are the outgrowth of a living experience and witness to eternal realities. Such interpretation is necessary, because the language in which the witness is borne is that of a generation that is past, and the forms in which the experience finds expression are being constantly outgrown.

Every great theologian has been such an interpreter. Augustine, Anselm, Luther, Edwards, each drew his material from the past. Each preached the same Gospel of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinful men. But the words in which each bore his witness were those of his own day

and generation. And the materials which he drew from the past were fused by each in the crucible of a living experience into forms that were new. It was this gift of adaptation, of interpretation, which gave them their power over men. If the theologian in our day is to exercise a like influence, he must be true to this lofty tradition. He, too, must be able to mediate between the past and the present, and to bring forth out of his treasury things new and old.

How, then, shall we mediate between the old and the new? What shall be the point of contact between the faith of the past and the life of the present? To this question there can be but one answer. It is the historic personality of Jesus Christ. He is the bridge by which we pass from the old to the new, and bind both together in the unity of a common spiritual life.

The answer suggests our theme to-night. I shall speak to you of

CHRIST AS THE VITALIZING PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY.

The subject cannot, indeed, claim the merit of novelty. Almost half a century ago, on the occasion of his induction into this very Chair, Henry B. Smith, in that masterly address on "The Idea of Christian Theology as a System," sought the organizing principle which gave unity to the theological system, and found it in Christ. "That God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself; this," he tells us, "is the keynote of Christianity, its luminous and life-giving message. In (the) mediation (of Christ) then is to be found the central principle of the divine economy."¹ In thus emphasizing with a freshness and vigor unusual in his day the Christological principle, Professor Smith was only following the example set by the best contemporary German theology. Weary of the barrenness of a rationalism which reduced all religion to a few self-evident truths, Schleiermacher and his successors sought to do justice to the distinctive features of the Christian life, and they found these in the doctrines which centre about the Person and Work of Christ. "The Christian Religion," says Schleiermacher,—and the definition has remained a classic to this day,—"is that form of teleological

¹ Faith and Philosophy, p. 132.

monotheism in which everything is referred to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.”¹ The note thus struck has not ceased to echo in the theological atmosphere. To behold God in the face of Christ and to report truthfully what she has seen,—this, all schools agree, should be the supreme aim of theology. It is this insistence upon Christ as the true source of theological knowledge which forms the rallying cry of the latest of the schools, that of Ritschl. Ritschl criticizes his contemporaries on the ground that while admitting the Christological principle in theory, they have not been true to it in practice. They have allowed foreign substances to come in between them and Christ, and so their vision has been obscured and their message distorted. Greek metaphysics, with its abstract speculation, scholastic logic, with its subtle distinctions, Hegelian philosophy, with its *à priori* construction;—these have obscured the simplicity of the Gospel. And so in its turn the new school raises the old cry, “Back to Christ.” Let no theology call itself Christian which has not its centre and its source in Him.

With this insistence upon Christ as the central principle of theology we find ourselves in hearty accord. If theology is truly to represent the Christian experience and adequately to confess the Christian faith, then it must centre in that divine human person from whom the experience springs and to whom the faith witnesses. So far as it loses touch with Christ, it is indeed as Ritschl claims,—abstract and barren, a mere scholastic speculation, of theoretical interest only.

But it is one thing to admit the importance of the Christological principle, and quite another to apply it in practice. It may be variously understood, and the range of its application be more or less widely admitted. There are questions here of difficulty and delicacy, upon a wise decision of which important issues depend. To some of these I would now call your attention.

There are three different senses in which the word Christ may be used. Each of these carries with it a distinct interpretation of the Christological principle. The first means by Christ the risen Christ, as distinct from the historic Jesus. It emphasizes our Lord’s present teaching by the Holy Spirit and lays little stress upon the past revelation of His earthly life. It is willing to recognize all religious truth as Christian, whether it can be

¹ Glaubenslehre, § 11.

brought into any direct connection with that life or not. The second restricts the term to the historic person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is suspicious of those who talk of present revelation, and maintains that those elements only have a rightful place in Christian theology which can be traced directly or indirectly to the influence of His earthly life. The third refuses to choose between the historic Jesus and the living Christ. It believes that the Christ who lived in Palestine 1900 years ago was the incarnation of that ever living God who is and ever has been influencing men by His Spirit. It is willing, therefore, to make place in Christian theology for truths which stand in no direct connection with the historic Jesus. But it insists that the right of these truths to such a place can be justified only as they are brought into vital relation with those that are Christian in a narrower sense. It is, indeed, in the continued supremacy in the religious experience of the race of elements which are directly traceable to the influence of the historic Jesus that it finds the surest proof of the existence and continued working of the living Christ.

1. Suffer me to unfold each of these positions a little more fully. In the first place, then, there are those who concentrate their attention upon the living Christ, and from their very sense of the reality and extent of His present working suffer the historic Jesus to fall into the background. They remind us that our Lord Himself points us beyond His earthly teaching. He warns His disciples that He has many things to say unto them which they cannot bear as yet, and bids them wait for the later teachings of His Holy Spirit. How pitifully small, in view of the later developments of Christian doctrine, seem the beginnings made during the earthly life of Jesus. If we would be true to Him we must look forward, not back. Not what the earthly Christ said to the first disciples, not even what the first disciples thought about Christ, but what He teaches to-day by the Holy Spirit,—this is the true source and the final test of Christian truth. The present teaching of Christ's Spirit uncontrolled by reference to His earthly life, this is the first and the most general interpretation of the Christological principle.

There are many different forms in which this tendency may show itself. Here is a mystic, longing for present communion with God, and in the joy of that communion, feeling no need of

that historic Christ through Whom alone less advanced Christians gain their knowledge of God. Here is a theologian, speculating upon the mystery of the divine existence, and, in his contemplation of the Eternal Son, losing sight of that human personality through Whom alone the divine Son is revealed. Here is a churchman, loyally striving for the supremacy of Christ, and, because of his very devotion to Christ, fearing to question the decisions of that ecclesiastical organization through which he believes the Spirit of his Master is speaking, and by whose triumph alone he believes that the victory of that Master can be secured. These types of mind, so different in other respects, agree in this that the historic personality of Jesus has little direct influence upon their thought. In each case, the historic Jesus is obscured by the living Christ.

What shall we say of this tendency? Certainly it stands for a great truth. There is a living and divine Spirit through Whom the influence of Christ is brought to bear upon men. Men may commune with their Lord to-day as really and as directly as in the days of old. The great systems of thought, the historic Christian institutions have not grown up apart from the divine Providence, and have their rightful place in mediating between the Christ and His followers. We can understand Him fully only as we take all these into the account.

But we may admit all this without shutting our eyes to the danger to which this tendency is exposed. It is the danger of an undue subjectivity, a subjectivity which, because it has no historic test to determine what is Christian is tempted, even while it takes the name of Christ upon its lips, to open the door to principles and practices which are not really His. We need indeed to be taught of the Spirit that we may understand the principles of Christ and be able to apply them to our daily life. But we may be very sure that, if this teaching be really Christ's, it will not contradict the revelation of His earthly life. His historic person must ever remain the test by which we try the spirits to see whether they be of God.

This danger is not merely imaginary. History is full of examples of it. How often has mysticism, seeking to rise above the historic Christ, fallen into superstition. How often has churchmanship, forgetting His example of humility and self-sacrifice, degenerated into tyranny? How often has theology, turning

away from the record of His life, lost itself in the fogs of speculation. It does not mend matters that such departure is often cloaked with Bible language or defended with phrases taken from the creed. Bible and creed alike can be rightly understood only in the light of that historic personality in Whom they centre. The substitution for this living concrete figure of an abstract conception, constructed to meet the necessities of the individual theologian is not less dangerous because consistent with a sincere belief in the pre-existence of the Son, or in the union of the two natures in one person. Nay, these phrases themselves, when divorced from contact with the historic personality Whom they seek to explain, may serve to obscure rather than to assist men's apprehension of that person. What does it profit us to call Christ "Lord," if we resolve His humanity into a mere appearance, and deny to His experiences of suffering and temptation any analogy with our own? What does it profit us to speak of God's incarnation in Jesus, if, after incarnation, humanity and Divinity remain as separate and unrelated as before? We avoid these dangers only as we hold steadfastly before our eyes the figure of the historic Christ, and test all theories which claim our acceptance by their ability to account for Him.

2. It is not strange, then, that men, feeling the danger of this exaggerated subjectivity, should rush to the other extreme. There are those who would restrict the term Christ exclusively to the historic person of Jesus of Nazareth, and who would banish from Christian theology all ideas which cannot be traced directly or indirectly to Him. This is the second and narrowest interpretation of the Christological principle.

On this common ground again we find differences. There are some who make the teaching of Christ their norm, and claim that the chief end of theological study should be to recover the theology of Jesus; there are others,—wider in outlook,—who add to the teaching of Jesus the impression made by His personality upon the Church. They admit that the Apostolic witness has its place in theology as truly as the Gospel picture, but they claim that if this witness is to be safely used, it must be separated as far as possible from philosophical admixture, and reduced to the simple judgment of the moral supremacy of Christ. The metaphysical terms in which a later age confessed its faith in Christ

are regarded as a corruption of the Gospel. What have we to do, we are asked, with such words, or with such ideas as Absolute, Logos, Trinity, and the like? Let us leave these to the Greeks, of whose philosophical subtlety they were begotten, and let us return to the simplicity which is in Christ.

Certainly there is much that is plausible in this appeal. More and more modern critical study is emphasizing the contrast between the person of our Lord as revealed in the Gospels and later theological speculation concerning that person. The question is a fair one whether in men's efforts to understand the mysteries of Christ's nature they have not lost the inspiration which comes from contact with Christ. We need to turn back to that tender human figure who walked in Galilee and Jerusalem; to hear His words, as did the first disciples; to feel, as they did, the influence of His personality, revealing to men through His human sacrifice the heart of God; inspiring them by His example to follow Him in like self-sacrifice.

But it is one thing to recognize the importance of the historic Christ, and quite another to deny the legitimacy of the speculative process by which Christians, earlier and later, have sought to understand Him. The danger of losing touch with Jesus may be a real one. But it is not to be corrected by making an arbitrary separation between theology and philosophy. As a matter of fact, such separation is impossible. As little as Christ can be separated from His surroundings, can the theology which centres in Christ be isolated from that contemporary thought which gives it form. Both alike,—the theology and the person,—have their roots deep in the soil of humanity. Neither can be understood apart from its environment. A return to Christ which ignores the intervening history is not only out of the question; it is not even to be desired. It would defeat the very end it is designed to serve, and weaken the supremacy it is designed to magnify. Christ is the centre of human history not merely chronologically, because we date our era from Him, but organically, because in Him all scattered rays of truth are gathered to a focus. When we isolate Him from any phase of human development we rob Him, in so far, of His supremacy. The Greeks had their contribution to make to theology as truly as the Jews. Their philosophers were prophets in disguise. By their speculation, there were wrought out those forms of thought through which the

universal supremacy of Christ found clearest intellectual expression. To banish from Christian theology the ideas which it has inherited from them would be to rob humanity of part of its spiritual birthright.

For, in thought as in life, Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil. Everywhere He built on foundations which His predecessors had laid, and used the materials which He found ready to His hands. He did not reveal a new God, but One who had long been at work in the world, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, of Moses and of David, of Isaiah and of the prophets; the God who from the beginning of human history had been revealing Himself to men, and whose revelation had met with response in the transformed lives of multitudes of redeemed men and women out of all the generations. This earlier religious history is the presupposition of Christ's work. Had the soil not been thus prepared, how could the new seed have found a lodgment, the new message a hearing? Christ deepened, purified and renewed the religious life, but He did not create it.

And as Christ did not create the religious life, so He did not create the religious conceptions in which that life found its expression. All great experiences have their corresponding ideas, and utter themselves in their appropriate vocabulary. Here, too, Christ uses what had gone before. In the Scriptures we learn to know the conceptions which gave form to the religious life of Christ's contemporaries, the theological atmosphere into which He was born. We read of the Law in which God has revealed His will, of the Messiah by whom He is to deliver His people, of the Kingdom which He is finally to establish. These are the expressions which recur in the teaching of Christ. He reaffirms the Law, professes to be the Messiah, and declares that "The Kingdom is at hand."

But if Christ does not create new theological conceptions, he transforms the old; if His teaching is always in terms familiar to His hearers, it is none the less true that on His lips the familiar words gain a fresh meaning. The law is the law of Moses, but it is applied with a spiritual insight such as Moses had never possessed. The Messiah is He who had been foretold by the prophets, but He wins His victory in a conflict which it was not given them to foresee. The Kingdom is that promised to the fathers, but its joys are higher and its triumphs more enduring than any for

which they hoped. Everywhere the old word gets a new meaning, the old idea a new content. It is the same, and yet it is not the same.

Let us take, by way of illustration, the Messianic idea. To the Jews of Christ's day the Messiah was an earthly hero, like David of old, who was to defeat the Romans in battle, and to give back to Israel that temporal dominion which they had lost. Even when the ideal was most exalted and the Messiah was clothed with supernatural attributes, it was still an ideal of earthly glory and prosperity, in which justice and judgment were rather the conditions or the accompaniments of the Kingdom than its substance. The word of the prophet concerning the Servant who was to save by suffering remained an enigma of which none possessed the key. And then the Christ appeared, and the Messianic Kingdom was actually established among men. In the person and life of its Founder all men might see what were its marks. How different the reality from the expectation. Not a Kingdom of earthly glory or prosperity, but a spiritual Kingdom, having its stronghold in the hearts of men, and the evidence of its presence in righteousness, in peace and in joy. Not a Kingdom of the great or of the mighty, but of the lowly and the meek, in which he was to be greatest who was the minister, and he first who was servant of all.¹ Not a Kingdom which gained its triumphs by the sword, but mighty through sacrifice, having its symbol in the cross, subduing its enemies by the spectacle of supreme suffering willingly undergone in their behalf. And yet, just because spiritual, lowly, self-sacrificing, a Kingdom more satisfying, more glorious, certain of a wider and of a more enduring triumph than the boldest of the prophets had dared to dream. Surely we have here a wondrous transformation. Christ has taken the ideal of Israel, and behold ! it has become new.

And what may thus be seen in the beginning of Christianity appears on a larger scale in the later history. Wherever the influence of Christ is felt there the earlier religious conceptions of man are transformed. Pass from Israel to Greece, and you will find fresh illustrations of this truth. The very ideas against which we have been warned as corruptions of the Gospel are themselves witnesses to the transforming power of Christ. Let us take, for example, the idea of the Logos. For centuries the

¹ Mark x : 43, 44.

Greeks have been striving to fathom the secret of the divine existence,—to penetrate that mystery behind whose impenetrable veil God the Absolute Being hides Himself from men's eager gaze. And in the divine Word they find at last the long-sought principle of Mediation. God may not, indeed, be known in Himself, but there is a Logos, a divine Word, coming forth from God, creating, revealing, inspiring. Through this Word men may gain knowledge of God. But alas, the gain is only in appearance. The bridge thus erected to span the gulf between God and man proves too weak to stand the strain of humanity's need. What is the Logos? Only an abstract conception, eluding all attempt at closer observation or definition; the mark, when all is said, of God's essential separateness from the world. And then comes Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, God's dearly beloved Son, in Whom at last, after all the centuries, the divine and the human meet and are one. And men trained in the discipline of the Greek schools find in Him the final truth lacking in their speculation,—the one stone necessary to complete their majestic edifice of thought. The Logos, it is Christ. In Him God has become incarnate. That divine Word which in the beginning was with God, and which ever since has been active in the world, has become flesh in Christ, and we behold His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.¹ And so the old word receives a new meaning, richer and fuller than the old. From being a term of separation, marking the impassable gulf between God and the world, the Logos has become a principle of union, witnessing to the essential kinship between the human and the divine. No one can understand the doctrinal history of the first five centuries who has not grasped the meaning of this transformation. The Nicene creed is the confession of a God no longer unknown but known,—a God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, very God yet very man; a God who in Jesus Christ, very man yet very God, is drawing men unto Himself.

So Christ transforms the conceptions of Greek philosophy, and forms them into vehicles for the proclamation of His Gospel. They do well who warn us of the danger of substituting an abstract conception like the Logos for the living personality of Jesus of Nazareth. But, while we heed the warning, never let us

¹ John i: 14.

forget that it was through this same Logos philosophy that the eyes of thoughtful men were opened to see in the God of all the world the Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. If sometimes the old words proved misleading, introducing into Christian theology ideas foreign to its genius, this does not prove that their use was a mistake. It only shows that their transformation by the Christian spirit was not everywhere complete. We shall correct the error, not by undoing the union, but by carrying it out to the end.

For the great ideas of the Greek philosophy, like all that have permanently maintained themselves, rest at bottom upon reality. The Absoluteness of God is not a mere speculation. It is in thought because it is first in experience. When all is said, there remains a mystery in God which we can never wholly fathom. There is a distance separating Him from men which even redemption serves to emphasize. The word of the Apostle remains true: "How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out."¹ None feel this more keenly and confess it more fully than those who have learned of Christ His lesson concerning the divine character and purpose, and in whom that submission which no creature can refuse takes the form of filial trust.

And so we might go on through the centuries and show how in each the old ideas which have dominated the thought of men, receive new content, as they are touched by the Spirit of Christ. It is this transforming influence which has suggested my title. I have called Christ the vitalizing principle of Christian theology because it is in His Person that theology finds the secret of its continual renewal. He is the spring from which in every age it draws the distinctive elements of its power. He is the germ cast upon the soil of human thought which makes that soil fruitful. Banish Him, and theology becomes abstract and barren. Return to Him, and it blossoms with new life.

3. To those who have gained this insight the Christological principle will have a meaning different from either we have considered. It will not mean the mere reproduction of the teaching of Jesus, nor of the thought of the first disciples about Jesus. Nor, on the other hand, can it be carried out without constant

¹ Rom. xi: 33.

reference to those distinctive elements which have entered into Christian thought through His earthly life. It will mean rather the effort to trace in the ever-expanding revelation of God in humanity the fructifying and transforming influence of that life. It will be the attempt to discover the new elements which have entered into the religious thought of man through Christ, and in the light of these to restate and correlate the older truths. It will be the attempt to give to each Christian doctrine that new and distinctive flavor which it receives from Christ.

But is this attempt feasible? Can we so combine the old and the new as to do justice to each? Is it possible so to state the several doctrines as to do justice to all that is best in the past development, while at the same time we leave Christ supreme? Let us see.

Take for example the doctrine of God. This is the oldest, the most complex and the most far-reaching of all doctrines. Hence it is best adapted to serve as illustration of our theme. If we can show the supremacy of Christ here, we may be well assured that it will be possible to do so everywhere else.

What then has Christ introduced into our thought of God? There are many names by which men have sought to define God. They have called Him Absolute. They have called Him Holy. They have called Him Sovereign. They have called Him Father. And all of these names are true. Each expresses a phase of the divine Nature and Character. Each rests upon facts of divine revelation. Each has a history of surpassing interest. But each receives its highest meaning from Christ.

Men have called God the Absolute. Beneath the ever-changing appearances of things, with their bewildering variety, they have perceived an underlying principle of unity. The world is not a chaos, but a cosmos. There is in experience an order, a uniformity, a permanence for which we can account only as we posit a single principle as the ground and explanation of all that is. This mysterious principle, unseen and yet most real, dimly perceived yet never perfectly grasped, revealing itself in our experience, yet ever transcending that experience, philosophy calls the Absolute, or God. And religion, in language warmer but no less emphatic, repeats the confession. "Now unto the King eternal, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, be honor, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen."¹

¹ I. Tim. i : 17.

They have called God Holy. What is the nature of this ultimate reality? How shall we think of God the Absolute? We search the universe in vain for a reply. "The deep saith, It is not in me, and the sea saith, It is not in me,"¹ But in the heart of man we find our answer. Conscience reveals the law of God, and we learn that God is holy.

From the beginning of human history God has been teaching men this lesson. In the ethnic religions, with their imperfect ethics; in Israel with its fuller revelation of the divine law; by His Providence with its inevitable retributions, through countless individual experiences of judgment and pardon, God has been revealing to men His holiness. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."²

They have called God Sovereign. What is the reason of the divine law? Why should God ordain this and forbid that? Why should He visit one action with displeasure and reward another with His favor? Granting that the right ought to be rewarded and the wrong punished, what makes this right rather than that? So men have asked through the centuries with a never-ceasing curiosity. And they have found their answer in the Sovereignty of God. The Will of God,—that is the supreme rule of right, the final principle, back of which it is profane to press. John Calvin joins hands with Duns Scotus, and both alike only repeat the words of the Apostle: "For who hath known the mind of God, or who hath been His counsellor. Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again. For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things; to Whom be glory for ever. Amen."³

But we have not yet reached the end. There is something more to come. Men have called God Father. And with that name Sovereignty loses all its terrors. The Will of God is indeed ultimate, but that Will is the expression of a Character. God is Love. In this great disclosure, the divine revelation culminates.

Sometimes men speak as though God's love were the discovery of Christianity. Nothing could be more false. Like each of the preceding truths, this has a long history, antedating Christ by many centuries. God has not loved men from the beginning without finding means to make His love known. Even heathen-

¹ Job xxviii: 14.

² Mic. vi: 8.

³ Rom. xi: 34-36.

ism is not without its anticipations of this truth. And in Israel we find it clearly revealed. God is not merely the Lawgiver, the King, the Judge. He is the Redeemer, the Saviour, the loving Father. Terrible as are His judgments for sin, His faithfulness and compassion are ever greater. "As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him."¹ He crowns men with loving-kindness and tender mercies.² Prophet and Psalmist alike exhaust language in their effort to find words adequate to express His goodness. The shepherd who cares for His sheep,³ the father who pities His children,⁴ the husband whose love endures despite the wife's unfaithfulness,⁵—these are only a few of many examples that might be chosen. Even mother-love is not great enough to picture that of God. "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."⁶ When the Apostle uttered that greatest of all sentences, "God is love," he was only bringing to a head the lessons of the centuries.

Absoluteness, Holiness, Sovereignty, Love—these are the four words in which we sum up our knowledge of God.

Do you ask what more is needed? What can Christ add to what has been said before? What can He do which has not already been done? I answer, this: He can live before men that life which is the perfect revelation of the divine Character, and so give to each of these great assertions concerning God a concreteness and definiteness, a richness and intensity of meaning, which it lacked before.

The love of God, it is an old story, and yet in the light of Christ's life and death how new it seems! The divine Fatherhood, which to the prophets had been primarily national, is now seen to be intensely individual, and for that very reason universal. The earlier limitations are removed. The middle wall of partition is broken down. God's care for Israel, his firstborn among the nations, now appears but as the first fruits of a love that is world-wide. "God so loved the world." And as the revelation broadens, so it deepens. Christ reveals not only the extent but also the nature and the cost of the divine love. It is a love that issues in sacrifice. "God so loved that He gave." It is a love that does not shrink from suffering. Its proof is the cross.

¹ *Psa. ciii : 11.*

² *Psa. ciii : 4.*
⁵ *Hos. i.*

³ *Psa. xxiii : 1.*
⁶ *Isa. xlix : 15.*

⁴ *Psa. ciii : 13.*

“Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.” This is the revolutionary message of Christianity. No wonder that men heard it with incredulity. That God the Lord of all the world should suffer for men’s sins ; that He should so love as to give His only begotten Son, that the world should not perish but have everlasting life,—this seemed to Celsus and his contemporaries past belief. They too believed in love of a certain kind. Disinterested and unimpassioned benevolence they could understand ; but a love that could suffer for sin,—this passed their comprehension. It seemed to them unworthy, undivine. Nothing less than the life and death of Christ could have overcome this instinctive resistance, and made sacrifice an integral element in our thought of God.

Now mark the bearing of this upon the divine Sovereignty. We do not weaken Sovereignty when we preach our Gospel of love. We rather reaffirm it with a new and deeper meaning. By so much as Christ intensifies our conception of God’s love, by so much He reinforces our faith in God’s Sovereignty. That God should suffer to save,—is not this the mystery of mysteries? How shall we explain it? In the fact that we are worthy of so great a sacrifice? Perish the thought! Arminius would have been the first to repudiate it. God alone can give the answer. In the depths of His nature lies the secret of redemption. Out of His great mercy He loved us, and in His blessed will we find at once our sole confidence and our highest joy.

Here is the point where the theology of Westminster needs correction. Men criticize that theology for its emphasis upon the divine decree. I can not think the criticism well taken. No theology that stands on any basis less firm can stand the strain of modern thought and life. The real difficulty with the Confession lies elsewhere. It is in the region of the divine Character. Here the very reverence of our fathers prevented them from entering into the full riches of God’s revelation in Christ. It seemed to them to belong to the divine Majesty that God could do as He chose, and the freedom of Sovereignty was identified with the arbitrariness of caprice. We are learning better. We see that there is no majesty like the majesty of love, no freedom like that which consists in obedience to its inner constraint. What we need is not less Sovereignty, but more Fatherhood. We need

¹ I. Cor. i : 23.

to put Christ on the throne,—not merely in name, but in fact. When we have done this we shall no longer be afraid of the divine decree. No thought will be more inspiring, no comfort more sweet, than this,—that our Father “hath foreordained from all eternity whatsoever cometh to pass.”¹

Nor need we fear that this insistence on the love of God will weaken our sense of His holiness. On the contrary. This, too, will gain new meaning at the cross of Christ. When we behold the cost of redemption we measure the sanctity of God. We see the law of right in its divine as well as in its human significance. It is not something imposed upon us from without at the arbitrary pleasure of God, but it is rooted in His Nature and glorified in His own divine experience. He shares the suffering which He inflicts that we may share the holiness which He requires. And so the holiness which stood as a barrier between God and man becomes the guarantee of their truest spiritual union.

But this is not all. Christ not only intensifies our sense of the divine holiness. He also makes our conception of it more definite. The great principles of the divine law are presented to us in His life and character with a clearness unknown before. He that would be holy as God is holy must walk in the footsteps of Christ. He must live as Christ lived, and, if need be, he must die as Christ died. His ends, his purposes, his hopes, his joys, must be Christ's. What a test is here for Christian living. How it purges away false ideals and quickens sluggish consciences. The Kingdom for which we labor is one in which the principles of Christ shall be really controlling; in which humility and brotherly kindness, purity and compassion, sacrifice and service, shall be the law of daily life. It is for this that our Christian institutions exist; for this that we build churches and schools; for this that we preach and teach, and send missionaries across the sea; for this that we long and pray. To make Christians like Christ, and the Church like Christ, and society like Christ,—this is the great end of all our striving. For it is this which the holy God seeks, and which He will require.

And God's Absoluteness; what of that? When we have come to see God in the face of Christ, have we outgrown the older lesson? Least of all. We still believe,—now more than ever,—in a great reality underlying all phenomena, giving unity and

¹ Conf. Faith, iii: 1.

meaning to the world. We still confess,—now more than ever,—that this reality eludes our utmost effort to grasp it. We, too, come at last to a barrier which we cannot surmount and gaze out into a distance which we cannot fathom. Face to face with the ultimate reality, knowledge must give place to faith. Wise and foolish, ignorant and learned, philosopher and Christian, all alike stand on the same footing of trust. We differ only in the object. That which others find in metaphysical abstractions, in empty concepts, like Reason or Will, or Matter or Force, we find in Christ. He is to us the key to the universe, its unifying and illumining principle. By Him we unlock its mysteries and relate its conflicting appearances. He is the centre of human history, the inspiration of human progress, and to the establishment of His Kingdom we see all things tending. By Him, therefore, we interpret God.

When, then, we say that God is Absolute, the affirmation has a meaning all its own. We mean that the Father Whom Christ reveals is really Lord of the universe. Of all the great affirmations of philosophy concerning a supreme ground and cause of things He is the subject. The world is His world and His its forces. Amid all apparent confusion and strife, in ways too complex for our understanding, He is working out to a successful issue His holy and loving purpose.

It is this great truth which finds expression in the doctrine of the Trinity,—the supreme Christian utterance concerning God. That God the Absolute has revealed Himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth in order that through union with Jesus He may unite men to Himself, this is the final word, as it is the deepest conviction of Christianity. And it is this conviction which the Trinity voices. A Father Almighty who is the cause of all, a living Spirit energizing in all, a divine yet human Christ in Whom the Father is revealed, and to Whom the Spirit witnesses,—this is the Christian Trinity. Only as we include these three can we adequately express the idea of God. Separate the doctrine of the Trinity from contact with the historic person of Jesus of Nazareth, and it becomes a mere metaphysical abstraction, empty and profitless; worse than profitless, misleading and dangerous. If the history of theology has proved anything it has proved that. Centre it in that living human personality Whom the Scriptures reveal, and it becomes the highest utter-

ance of the Christian experience, the complete formula in which all Christian truth is gathered to a head. For after all there are but two alternatives. Either with agnosticism we must banish all concrete features from our thought of the ultimate reality, in which case God becomes a mere name, void of all content, a metaphysical zero, the negation of all knowledge and of all possibility of knowledge. Or else we must interpret the Absolute in the light of the highest we know. Our thought of God must gain its content from the world of experience, living, present, concrete, full of ethical and spiritual meaning. This has been the instinct of humanity from the first. In every age men have personified their gods. And in this case the unreflective practice has proved the truest philosophy. The doctrine of the Trinity but carries out the process to the end. We interpret God by the highest personality. And to us that highest is Christ.

So Christ transforms our thought of God. And what is true of this most important of all doctrines is true in equal measure of all the rest. Whether it be the world or man, whether it be sin or salvation, whether it be the Bible or the Church, whether it be immortality or judgment, each doctrine receives new content from Him, and in each the new revelation is but the confirmation and completion of the old. He lives on earth the perfect life, and our thought of man is transformed. From Him we learn what man ought to be. In Him we see what man may become. Each aspect of human experience receives in Him its highest illustration. He is at once dependent and free. He is a son, yet He is servant of all. As we behold His perfect character, sin appears in all its blackness. It is not mere transgression of law. It is personal disobedience to a loving Father. And salvation is not merely deliverance from penalty. It is transformation into the image of Christ. As of this life, so of that to come. By the resurrection of Christ immortality is changed from hope to conviction, and the unseen world becomes the Father's house, whither Christ has gone before to prepare places for those who love Him. And so we might go on indefinitely, tracing His influence in each successive doctrine, and from each gaining new illustrations of our theme.

But I have said enough. My purpose to-night is only to indicate a principle, not to follow it into all its applications. The principle is this, that it should be the aim of the Christian theolo-

gian, not only in the system as a whole, but in each individual doctrine, to make Christ supreme. That theology only fulfils its ideal which faces every difficulty, and answers every question in the light which comes from Him. How far this ideal is from complete realization those who are best read in Christian history can answer best. Much has been accomplished in the application of the Christological principle, but much still needs to be done. Many dark corners still remain where the light of His presence has not penetrated. Many conceptions still maintain themselves which have not yet been brought into harmony with His Gospel. Many systems still confess Him in name which are yet far from reproducing His Spirit. The ideal remains an ideal. If we, as little as our predecessors may hope to realize the ideal perfectly, we can at least apprehend it clearly, adopt it heartily, and bend all our energies to its accomplishment.

It is in this spirit that I would undertake my work. I believe that God is in the world to-day, leading men by His Spirit into larger and ever larger apprehension of His truth. Because of this, I am not afraid of the freest research. If God be really in the world, our study will but serve to make the fact more plain. I rejoice therefore in the achievements of modern science, in the sphere of religion as truly as in all other departments of human life. I welcome the new results in history and exegesis, in literary and historical criticism. No modern theologian can do his work who ignores these. But I believe that the net result of all these studies will be,—nay, I believe that it is already,—to set in a clearer light, and to establish on a firmer foundation, the supremacy of Christ. To help men to see this, and to apply along all the lines the results which follow from this insight,—this I conceive to be the highest duty as it is the greatest privilege of the Christian theologian. This is that mediation of which we spoke at the beginning of the hour, and which was never more needed than to-day. To see in Christ the key to all truth, present as well as past ; to grasp Him in His relation, not to the historic creeds alone, but to the great ideas of *our* time ; to use these ideas not as masters but as servants, not conforming Christ to them, but transforming them by Christ ; and so to make confession of Him in words which all men can understand. This is surely to realize the ideal of Christian theology, to render highest service, both to the Church and to the world.

Yes, Christ. He is the centre of our holy religion. In His divine-human person at once so majestic and so tender, so far surpassing our highest attainment, even our highest ideal, yet so winning in its human approachableness; Jesus of Nazareth, yet God incarnate for our salvation, in Him we find the source both of light and of power. He is the glory of our theology, its renewing and vitalizing principle. Banish Him, and theology becomes merely a philosophical system, one among many; theoretically interesting, it may be, but without power over life. Accept Him, and it becomes the confession of a redeemed humanity, the highest utterance of the supreme human experience, the beacon-light by whose rays all lesser experiences are transfigured, and appear at length in their divine significance and their prophetic meaning. It is as if one should take refuge from a storm in some great cathedral. In the gloom and darkness the proportions of the whole are obscured. The great pillars rise up into the shadow and are lost. There is a coldness, a barrenness about the place which makes one shudder. Worship seems impossible. When suddenly,—the storm over,—through the great rose window above the entrance there bursts a ray of sunshine, and in an instant the entire building is transformed. The great pillars are no longer lost in the darkness. They are seen as the necessary support of that roof up to whose delicate tracery we gaze enchanted. The gloomy recesses of the nave are flooded with a rosy light, and in the new brightness the separate parts are seen in their true harmony and proportion. The entire building ministers in a hundred subtle and persuasive ways to that spirit of worship which before the light came it destroyed. The words of the Psalmist rise unbidden to our lips. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."¹ My hearers, that cathedral is theology, and the window is Christ. God grant that it may be mine to study nave and pillar in the light that comes from Him.

¹ Psa. cxxii : 1.

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